

The Hand as a Curette in
Post-Partum Hemorrhage

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THE HAND AS A CURETTE IN POST-PARTUM HEMORRHAGE.

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ON the 21st of May, 1878, at 8.30 A. M., I was called to attend Mrs. J. in her fourth labor; the child was born at 10 A. M., and weighed ten pounds. The head had presented with the occiput to the left acetabulum. There was no necessity for interference in the delivery of the child, but at her earnest solicitation, I gave a little chloroform from time to time, not enough, however, to destroy consciousness before the last two pains, when it was pushed to the point of destroying her consciousness of the birth of the child.

The head was received with my right hand as it passed comfortably and safely over the perineum, the uterus being grasped firmly with my left hand on the abdomen for the purpose of making it follow the child with the last pain, so as to secure expulsion of the placenta, and by firm contraction, guard against hemorrhage. The cord was wrapped around the child's neck.

The nurse's hand was made to take the place of my hand, above the pubes, in holding the firmly contracted uterus, while I tied and severed the cord, and removed the child to another part of the bed.

My left hand then took the place of the nurse's hand on the abdomen, when I found that the uterus had enlarged again. The index finger of my right hand found the placenta in the vagina, and a little tightening of the cord brought it away in a perfect state.

Up to this point, there had been no visible hemorrhage; but in a few seconds, blood poured from her in a perfect

avalanche, deluging the bed and running down upon the floor.

I called for ice, and at once passed my right hand into the cavity of the uterus, manipulating its surface, while I grasped its fundus firmly with my left hand. The uterus responded promptly, expelling my hand into the vagina, while I held it firmly contracted with my hand above the pubes. A drachm dose of Squibb's fluid extract of ergot was given, and I considered everything safe; but in a few minutes I felt the uterus enlarging, and another large gush of blood came from the vagina.

My right hand, containing a lump of ice, was a second time passed into the cavity of the uterus, the clotted blood turned out, and the hand and ice retained there until the uterus expelled them. The hand was withdrawn, but the ice left in the vagina. Drachm doses of Squibb's fluid extract of ergot were being given every five or ten minutes, and two drachms were introduced hypodermically, but it brought no response from the uterus.

A second time I considered the case safe, so firm was the womb contracted under my hand, but I was doomed to disappointment.

In a few minutes the uterus expanded for the third time, and blood came gushing from the vagina. My hand, with a large lump of ice, was a third time carried into the cavity of the uterus with the same results as above.

Allowing the hand and ice to remain in the vagina against the os uteri, the os was found speedily to relax, and up they went for the fourth time into the uterus, to be expelled as before and with no better results.

I then threw half an ounce of Squibb's fluid extract of ergot into the rectum; and with this she had taken one and a half ounces of ergot, and still it had shown no perceptible effect in producing tonic contractions of the uterus. The patient had felt nothing like after-pains.

She was becoming nauseated. I could push the ergot no further. Her face was blanched, her sight dim, and her pulse very frequent and feeble. Instead of profuse hemor-

rhage at intervals, there was now constant and free bleeding, with an occasionally increased gush. The uterus under the hand, on the abdomen, was evidently much larger than it ought to be, and full of blood.

I began to be apprehensive of the result. The uterus showed not the slightest disposition to tonic contraction. It would contract and expand, contract and expand, as often as means were brought to bear upon its cavity, and withdrawn.

I speedily revolved in my mind cases of obstinate and profuse uterine hemorrhage, not following labor at term, and the means which I had used to arrest them. I thought of hemorrhage from fungous granulations in the cavity of the uterus, and its prompt arrest by the curette; I thought of hemorrhage following abortions, immediately or weeks after, and its prompt arrest by raking off the surface of placental attachment, with the curette or finger-nail. I thought of injections of hot water, Churchill's iodine, Monsell's solution of sub-sulphate of iron, the galvanic battery, compression of the abdominal aorta. The pros and cons of all these remedies were rapidly considered, and I determined to pass my hand for the fifth time into the cavity of the uterus, and with my finger-nails, as a curette, rake thoroughly the placental surface.

This was done with the right hand, after all the clotted blood had been turned out, while the left hand, above the pubes, steadied the organ. As I raked, the uterus made efforts to expel my hand, but they were so feeble that with a little effort I was enabled to keep it in the cavity until I had accomplished my purpose pretty thoroughly, before it was expelled into the vagina. The hand remained there only a few seconds, before relaxation of the os allowed it to enter the uterus again, and I proceeded to give the placental surface a second thorough raking with my finger nails, not being fully satisfied with the first manipulation of this kind.

Feeble were the efforts of the uterus that expelled my hand this time, and in a few minutes it expanded again;

but notwithstanding this state of atony, my patient did not lose a teaspoonful of blood after the first raking of the placental surface,

The uterus remained enlarged and its mouth patulous for about forty-five minutes, when severe after-pains set in, producing firm contractions of the organ, and I had no further trouble in the case. The pains continued for several days, and were so severe that I was obliged to give morphia and camphor-water liberally. Her uterus and vagina were washed out daily with warm water, for eight or ten days. I never had a patient make a better recovery.

The frequent and successful use of the curette in my hands, in many cases of uterine hemorrhage where other means had failed, suggested the use of the hand as a curette in the above case; and it will be seen, from the history of this case, that, although the uterus remained relaxed and much enlarged for three quarters of an hour after my last manipulation, there was no loss of blood from the moment I commenced the use of the manual curette.

In any future case of post-partum hemorrhage, where I cannot produce prompt contraction of the uterus, or where the contractions are clonic and not tonic, I would not waste time with the usual manipulations in its cavity to excite contractions, or wait for ice or other styptic remedies. I would promptly use my hand as a curette to the placental surface, confidently expecting prompt arrest of the hemorrhage.

The cause of clonic contractions of the uterus in this case, and the resulting hemorrhage, is not perfectly satisfactory to my mind. While the patient was in labor I never saw pains better, or more efficient. Each pain told most perceptibly on dilatation of the os, and then on expulsion of the child. There was no delay in its progress from beginning to end. The last pain shut the uterus up, and forced the complete placenta into the vagina, yet in a few minutes the uterus was greatly enlarged and pouring out torrents of blood.

Some, who are opposed to the use of chloroform in labor, may be inclined to attribute the post-partum atony of the

uterus in this case to the anesthetic, yet it had no effect in diminishing the force of the pains, or retarding the progress of the labor, even to the point of expelling the placenta; and I may here add, that in a large obstetrical practice of twenty-eight years this is the second case in which I have had any troublesome post-partum hemorrhage, although the cases of labor are very rare in which I fail to give chloroform. My first and only case previous to this was in a primipara, to whom I gave no chloroform, because she and her friends were afraid of it.

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